

What is claimed is:

1. A system for making customer reservations, the system comprising:

5 at least one individual service provider through which reservations for the respective individual service providers may be made directly;

a central reservation provider through which reservations for the at least one individual service  
10 provider may be made; and

means for communicating between the central reservation provider and the respective individual service providers, wherein a first portion of the available reservations from each individual service  
15 provider are held by the central reservation provider and a second portion of the available reservations from each individual service provider are held by each respective individual service provider and, if a reservation requested from either the central  
20 reservation provider or an individual service provider is not available from that provider, available reservations are transferred from the other of the central reservation provider or the individual service provider to the central reservation provider or the  
25 individual service provider via the means for communicating so as to allow a reservation to be made.

2. A reservation system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the central reservation provider is an Internet booking  
30 service.

3. A reservation system as claimed in claim 2, wherein the individual service provider uses computer software for communicating automatically with the Internet  
35 booking service.

4. A reservation system as claimed in claim 3, wherein

the reservation system is installed over a local area network.

5        5.    A reservation system as claimed in claim 1, wherein  
the system comprises means for automatically activating  
the means for communicating between the central  
reservation provider and individual service providers at  
regular intervals to transfer available reservations  
between the providers if the distribution of the  
10        available reservations between the providers is out of  
balance.

15        6.    A reservation system as claimed in claim 1, the  
system further comprising means for reserving one of a  
plurality of items from available reservations, in which  
the time period of availability of each item is divided  
into consecutive blocks of a predetermined duration so  
as to provide a plurality of sets of said consecutive  
blocks representing the total availability of items  
20        within the time period, wherein the system accepts a  
reservation request if at least one consecutive block is  
available for each part of the time period for which the  
reservation is required such that blocks relating to  
more than one of the items may be combined to provide  
25        the reservation.

30        7.    A reservation system for reserving one of a  
plurality of items, the system comprising means for  
dividing the time period of availability of each item  
into consecutive blocks of a predetermined duration so  
as to provide a plurality of sets of said consecutive  
blocks representing the total availability of items  
within the time period, wherein the system accepts a  
reservation request if at least one consecutive block is  
35        available for each part of the time period for which the  
reservation is required such that blocks relating to  
more than one of the items may be combined to provide

the reservation.

8. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, further comprising:

5 a database for storing data defining the numbers and types of items available for reservation together with details of any reservations made; and  
means for calculating the number of available  
blocks using the data from the database each time that a  
10 reservation is requested.

9. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system is for reserving a plurality of different types of item and the blocks are tagged to indicate the  
15 type of item to which they refer.

10. A reservation system as claimed in claim 9, wherein a reservation is only made if at least one consecutive block relating to the type of item required is available  
20 for each consecutive part of the time period for which the reservation is required.

11. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system is for making restaurant reservations and the  
25 blocks are of 15 minute duration.

12. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes means for handling a fixed location reservation such that when a fixed location reservation  
30 is requested, a set of consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations are designated as fixed location blocks, the blocks corresponding to the  
35 reservation time period requested are designated as being occupied and the remaining designated fixed location blocks may not be combined with blocks other

than the said fixed location blocks to form a reservation.

13. A reservation system as claimed in claim 12,  
5 wherein if consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations are not present, the system preferably alerts a user to the fact that it is possible that not  
10 all of the reservations made by the system will be honoured if the fixed location reservation is accepted.

14. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes:

15 means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising means for checking whether any other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made when a fixed location reservation is requested;

20 means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations; and

means for designating the selected blocks  
25 corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied, wherein if no other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which precede the reservation time period are designated as fixed location blocks  
30 which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and the selected blocks coming after the reservation time period are retained as fungible or combinable blocks.

35 15. A reservation system as claimed in claim 14, wherein the system further comprises means for identifying the latest block in time to have been

designated as a fixed location block, such that when the system determines that other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which precede the latest block to be  
5 designated as a fixed location block are designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and the selected blocks coming after the last block to be designated as a fixed location block are retained in the system as  
10 fungible or combinable blocks.

16. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising:

15 means for checking whether any other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made when a fixed location reservation is requested;

means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the  
20 reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations; and

means for designating the selected blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied, wherein if no other fixed location  
25 reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which precede the reservation time period and any buffer period which the service provider choses to add before the reservation period are retained as fungible or combinable blocks, and the  
30 selected blocks coming after the reservation time period are designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation.

17. A reservation system as claimed in claim 16,  
35 wherein the system further comprises means for identifying the earliest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block, such that when the

system determines that other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which come after the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block are designated  
5 as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and the selected blocks coming before the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block are retained in the system as fungible or combinable blocks.

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18. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes:

means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising:

15 means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations;

20 means for identifying the earliest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block;

means for identifying the latest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block; and

25 means for designating the selected blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied, wherein the system designates the blocks which come after the earliest block to be designated and the blocks which precede the latest block to be designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation, and  
30 wherein any remaining blocks from the selected blocks are retained as fungible or combinable blocks.

19. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, further comprising:

35 means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising means for checking whether any other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested

have been made when a fixed location reservation is requested;

means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations;

means for designating the selected blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied;

means for identifying the latest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block across all reservations made if not treated under way (iv);

means for identifying the earliest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block across all reservations made if not treated under way (iv); and

means for treating each of the separate fixed location reservations in any one of the following ways in order to maximise the number of fungible or combinable blocks available within the database at any time:

1) designating the selected blocks which precede the latest block as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and designating the selected blocks coming after the last block as fungible or combinable blocks; or

ii) designating the selected blocks which come after the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and designating the selected blocks coming before the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block as fungible or combinable blocks which are retained; or

iii) designating the blocks which come between the earliest block and the latest block as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation, and designating any remaining blocks

from the selected blocks as fungible or combinable blocks which are retained; or

iv) designating all the selected blocks as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other  
5 blocks to form a reservation,

wherein the way in which each separate fixed location reservation is treated may be altered each time that a new reservation is made, and the latest block and earliest block are re-identified each time that a new  
10 reservation is made or that the way in which any fixed location reservation is treated is altered.

20. A reservation system as claimed in claim 19, the system further comprising means for handling at least  
15 two fixed location reservations for the same item, in which the at least two reservations are treated as a single reservation in one of ways (i), (ii) and (iii), and any blocks located between the at least two reservations in time are designated as fixed location  
20 blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation.

21. A reservation system as claimed in claim 19, the system further comprising means to split the dining  
25 session into two separate sessions such that, if at any time every block representing a reservation has been reserved, the session may be split into a first session up to and/or including that time and a second session including and/or from after that time in order to  
30 further maximise the number of fungible or combinable blocks available within the system at any time.

22. A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein blocks or sets of blocks of predetermined duration  
35 representing items available for reservation from an individual service provider are distributed between a central reservation provider and the individual service



provider such that reservations may be made through either of the individual service provider or the central reservation provider.

5      23. A reservation system as claimed in claim 22, the  
system further comprising means for communicating  
between the central reservation provider and the  
individual service provider, wherein if a reservation  
requested from either the central reservation provider  
10      or the individual service provider is not available from  
that provider, available blocks or sets of blocks are  
transferred from the other of the central reservation  
provider or the individual service provider to the  
central reservation provider or the individual service  
15      provider via the means for communicating so as to allow  
a reservation to be made.

20      24. A reservation system as claimed in claim 22, the  
system further comprising means for communicating  
between the central reservation provider and the  
individual service provider, wherein if the number of  
blocks or sets of blocks held by either the central  
reservation provider or the individual service provider  
falls below a predetermined minimum level at any time,  
25      available blocks are transferred from the other of the  
central reservation provider or the individual service  
provider to the central reservation provider or the  
individual service provider via the means for  
communicating.

30      25. A reservation system as claimed in claim 22,  
wherein the system is configured such that fixed  
location reservations may only be made through the  
individual service provider.

35      26. A reservation system as claimed in claim 25,  
wherein if the blocks required to make a fixed location

reservation are not available from the central reservation provider or the individual service provider, the system alerts a user to the fact that it is possible that not all the reservations will be honoured if the  
5 fixed location reservation is accepted.